

Chapter 3—Identifying Issues

Introduction

Issues were generated from local knowledge of road conditions by the IDT members, public response to a variety of project proposals, public meetings, and discussion with other public agencies. The issues were sorted into two categories: forest scale and sub-forest scale. Only the forest scale issues will be addressed through this roads analysis project. Sub-forest scale issues may be localized or may in some cases be issues that cover substantial areas on the Forests, but they can be best addressed at a scale below the forest level. Examples of sub-forest scale analyses would be watershed, geographic area, or project area assessments.

Road Analysis Issues at the Forest Scale

Road maintenance funding is not adequate to maintain and sign roads to the current objective or operational maintenance levels:

- Appropriated road maintenance dollars are not adequate to maintain the existing transportation system to the prescribed maintenance levels and traffic service levels.
- Directional, warning, and road number signing needs to meet legal standards. Most of the roads on Malheur National Forest System Lands are currently signed to standard, while many roads on the portion of the Ochoco National Forest System Lands administered by the Malheur are not currently signed to standard.
- Some current OML 3-5 roads do not meet all the requirements of the Highway Safety Act. For example, limited sight distance is creating a safety problem on some roads.

Road improvement funding is not adequate to meet assigned traffic service levels:

- Some road realignments, widening, and surfacing are needed to accommodate anticipated increases in traffic volumes and changes in vehicle types.

There are potentially adverse environmental impacts to water quality and habitat for Threatened and Endangered or Sensitive species that result both from the current Forest road system and from unauthorized, user-created unclassified roads:

- This analysis will identify which of the minimum primary Forest roads or road segments have the greatest risks, and also identify which

- subwatersheds have the greatest overall risks. Sub-forest level roads analyses should evaluate which other roads are causing adverse impacts and prioritize how those impacts can be reduced or eliminated.

Past efforts to close and decommission roads have been only partially successful:

- When decommissioning efforts are not effective at eliminating motorized use, it merely converts a system road into an unclassified road.
- When road closure efforts are not effective at eliminating motorized use, it results in unwanted resource impacts and an increase in need for maintenance and associated funding.
- Problems with continued motorized use of decommissioned roads and non-compliance with road closures continue to increase in magnitude, and the credibility of the program is threatened.

There are currently no primary routes for public and administrative access to some relatively large areas on the Forest that are outside of inventoried roadless areas:

- There are a few areas on the Forest including the Roberts Creek area, the Utley Butte Wildlife Emphasis Area, the Dry Cabin Wildlife Emphasis Area and the Deerhorn Creek area that have little or no motorized access currently available to the Forest Service or the public.

Some roads may not be under the appropriate jurisdictions:

- In the past, some roads that had been under Forest Service jurisdiction for many years have been changed to county jurisdiction. There may be additional Forest roads that might be more appropriate to be under county jurisdiction, or vice-versa.

In the past there have been some road maintenance agreements between the Forest Service and the Counties, but there are none currently in effect:

- It is possible that some County and Forest road maintenance activities could be more efficient if shared maintenance agreements were in place.

Road Analysis Issues at the Sub-Forest Scale

This analysis was primarily concerned with issues at the Forest Scale. The following section contains some issues that should be considered during sub-Forest scale analyses. It is not intended to be all-inclusive, as different analyses will likely have site-specific issues associated with particular areas.

The public is concerned that decisions about reducing or reconfiguring the Forest's transportation system might be made without the benefit of public involvement:

Forest roads are an integral part of the entire public road system on the Forest. People rely on them to drive to their jobs, recreate on the Forest, to visit friends and relatives and for many other purposes.

- Decisions that will change the existing system will occur through public involvement and site-specific analyses using the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, and will consider changes to any roads in the system now or proposed for addition or deletions from the system in the future.

There are potentially adverse environmental impacts from the current Forest road system and from unauthorized, user-created unclassified roads:

- Sub-forest level roads analyses should evaluate which roads are causing adverse impacts, and prioritize how to reduce or eliminate those impacts.

Unclassified roads need to be inventoried or identified, and a management strategy for each road needs to be defined:

- Options could include adding to the classified road system, decommissioning, or converting to another use such as a trail.

Road decommissioning and road restrictions (permanent and seasonal closures) have not been consistently effective:

- Road closure and decommissioning methods and enforcement vary widely and in many cases have not been effective, and as a result allowed continued unauthorized use and unwanted environmental effects.

There is currently inadequate public and administrative access to some areas on the Forest that are outside of inventoried roadless areas:

- There are some local areas listed in the Forest Plans as suitable for timber harvest that are still substantially unroaded.
- There are a few large areas including the Roberts Creek area, the Utley Butte Wildlife Emphasis Area, the Dry Cabin Wildlife Emphasis Area and the Deerhorn Creek area that have little or no motorized access currently available to the Forest Service or the public.
- Many National Forest System roads that provide access to scattered parcels of NFS lands cross privately owned lands. The Forest Service does not have

legal rights-of-way on many of these roads, denying the general public motorized access to portions of NFS Lands.

High road densities in some areas of the Forest are causing adverse impacts to resources and users:

- High open road densities can fragment habitat for some species, affect the quality of big game hunting, and create conflicts between non-motorized and motorized users, and can also affect overall watershed health.

The Forest road system provides significant vectors for spread of noxious weeds on NFS, other public, and private lands.

Decisions to close or decommission existing roads may have effects on fire suppression initial attack response times and fuels treatments activities.

The sub-Forest analyses need to discuss proposed road status changes that may affect access for traditional tribal activities with the appropriate tribes.

Forest access for winter recreation may not be adequate:

- Increasing snowmobile and cross-country ski use in some areas of the Forest is creating parking congestion problems and safety concerns and may be limiting the number of users and kinds of use. Better access to heavily used areas may be needed.

Both all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and highway vehicles are used on the same roads and occasionally at the same time, which is a safety problem:

- Oregon State Statute 821.020 establishes the areas where the exemption from equipment requirements for off-road vehicles is applicable. Exemptions apply to lands, roads and places that are open to the public and roads, other than two-lane gravel roads, that are open to the public. Some of the problems that have been experienced on the Forest include recreationists unfamiliar with State and Federal Policy, recreationists unfamiliar with the amount of traffic on seemingly un-traveled roads and inattention to road conditions.